

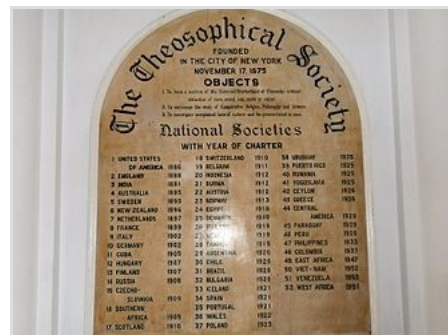


Karma, by Annie Besant (1895)

Karma is the title of a book by Annie Besant published in 1895, about Karma (the law of cause and effect), believed by Theosophists & esotericists to be an immutable, inescapable law applicable to everyone.

Quotes

(Full text, multiple formats online (<https://archive.org/details/karmaoobesagoog/>))



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- These manuals... are written for the busy men and women of the work-a-day world, and seek to make plain some of the great truths that render life easier to bear and death easier to face. Written by servants of the Masters who are the Elder Brothers of our race, they can have no other object than to serve our fellow men. Preface
- Every thought of man upon being evolved passes into the inner world, and becomes an active entity by associating itself, coalescing we might term it, with an elemental — that is to say, with one of the semi-intelligent forces of the kingdoms. It survives as an active intelligence — a creature of the mind's begetting — for a longer or shorter period proportionate with the original intensity of the cerebral action which generated it. Thus a good thought is perpetuated as an active, beneficent power, an evil one as a maleficent demon. And so man is continually peopling his current in space with a world of his own, crowded with the offspring of his fancies, desires, impulses and passions; a current which re-acts upon any sensitive or nervous organization which comes in contact with it, in proportion to its dynamic intensity...* ~The Master KH quoted in *The Occult World* pp. 89. 90. p. 5
- No more graphic picture of the essential nature of Karma has ever been given than in...one of the early letters of Master K. H.. If... clearly understood, with all their implications, the perplexities which surround the subject will for the most part disappear, and the main principle underlying karmic action will be grasped. They will therefore be taken as indicating the best line of study, and we shall begin by considering the creative powers of man. All we need as preface is a clear conception of the invariability of law, and of the great planes in Nature. p. 6
- The Invariability of Law. That we live in a realm of law, that we are surrounded by laws that we cannot break, this is a truism. Yet when the fact is recognised in a real and vital way, and when it is seen to be a fact in the mental and moral world as much as in the physical, a certain sense of helplessness is apt to overpower us, as though we felt ourselves in the grip of some mighty Power, that, seizing us, whirls us away whither it will. The very reverse of this is in reality the case, for the mighty Power, when it is understood, will obediently carry us whither we will; all

forces in Nature can be used in proportion as they are understood "Nature is conquered by obedience" — and her resistless energies are at our bidding as soon as we, by knowledge, work with them and not against them. We can choose out of her boundless stores the forces that serve our purpose in momentum, in direction, and so on, and their very invariability becomes the guarantee of our success. p. 6

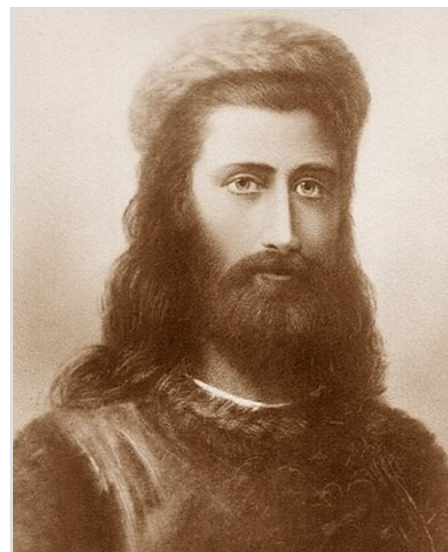
- On the invariability of law depend the security of scientific experiment, and all power of planning a result and of predicting the future. On this the chemist rests, sure that Nature will ever respond in the same way, if he be precise in putting his questions. A variation in his results is taken by him as implying a change in his procedure, not a change in Nature. And so with all human action; the more it is based on knowledge, the more secure is it in its forecastings, for all "accident" is the result of ignorance, and is due to the working of laws whose presence was unknown or overlooked. In the mental and moral worlds, as much as in the physical, results can be foreseen, planned for, calculated on. Nature never betrays us; we are betrayed by our own blindness. p. 7

- That law should be as invariable in the mental and moral worlds as in the physical is to be expected, since the universe is the emanation of the One, and what we call Law is but the expression of the Divine Nature. As there is one Lite emanating all, so there is one Law sustaining all ; the worlds rest on this rock of the Divine Nature as on a secure, immutable foundation. p.7

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- To study the workings of Karma on the line suggested by the Master, we must gain a clear conception of the three lower planes, or regions, of the universe, and of the Principles related to them. The names given to them indicate the state of the consciousness working on them... The lowest vehicle, the Gross Body, serves the consciousness for its work on the physical plane, and in this the consciousness is limited within the capacities of the brain. The term Subtle Body covers a variety of astral bodies, respectively suitable to the varying conditions of the very complicated region indicated by the name psychic plane. On the devachanic plane there are two well-defined levels, the Form Level and the Formless Level; on the lower, consciousness uses an artificial body, the Mivavi Rdpa, but the term Mind Body seems suitable as indicating that the matter of which it is composed belongs to the plane of Manas. On the formless level the Causal Body must be used. Of the Buddhic plane it is



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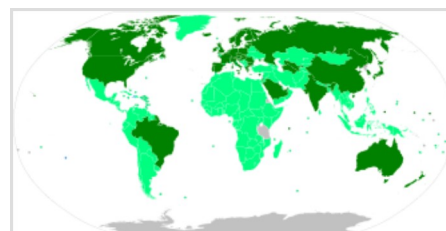
This assurance that **perfect Justice rules the world** finds support from the increasing knowledge of the evolving Soul...we learn with ever-growing certainty, and therefore with ever-increasing joy, that the Good Law is working with undeviating accuracy...

needless to speak.

- Now the matter on these planes is not the same, and speaking generally, the matter of each plane is denser than that of the one above it. This is according to the analogy of Nature, for evolution in its downward course is from rare to dense, from subtle to gross.
- The mind... generates images, thought-forms. Imagination has very accurately been called the creative faculty of the mind, and it is so in a more literal sense than many may suppose who use the phrase. This image-making capacity is the characteristic power of the mind, and a word is only a clumsy attempt to partially represent a mental picture.
- An idea, a mental image, is a complicated thing, and needs perhaps a whole sentence to describe it accurately, so a salient incident in it is seized, and the word naming this incident imperfectly represents the whole; we say "triangle," and the word calls up in the hearer's mind a picture, which would need a long description if fully conveyed in words; we do our best thinking in symbols, and then laboriously and imperfectly summarise our symbols into words.
- In regions where mind speaks to mind there is perfect expression, far beyond anything words may convey; even in thought-transference of a limited kind it is not words that are sent, but ideas. A speaker puts into words such part of his mental pictures as he can, and these words call up in the hearer's mind pictures corresponding to those in the mind of the speaker; the mind deals with the pictures, the images, not with the words, and half the controversies and misunderstandings that arise come about because people attach different images to the same words, or use different words to represent the same images. p. 14
- A thought-form... is a mental image, created —or moulded—by the mind out of the subtle matter of the higher psychic plane, in which, as above said, it works. This form, composed of the rapidly vibrating atoms of the matter of that region, sets up vibrations all around it; these vibrations will give rise to sensations of sound and colour...
- Thought-forms may also be directed by their progenitor towards particular persons, who may be helped or injured by them, according to the nature of the ensouling Elemental; it is no mere poetic fancy that good wishes, prayers, and loving thoughts are of value to those to whom they are sent; they form a protective host encircling the beloved, and ward off many an evil influence and danger. p. 19
- Not only does a man generate and send forth his own thought-forms, but he also serves as a magnet to draw towards himself the thought-forms of others from the astral plane around him, of the classes to which his own ensouled thought-forms belong. He may thus attract to himself large reinforcements of energy from outside, and it lies within himself whether these forces that he draws into his own being from the external world shall be of a good or of an evil kind.



Karma brings us ever back to rebirth, binds us to the wheel of births and deaths. Good Karma drags us back as relentlessly as bad, and the chain which is wrought out of our virtues holds as firmly and as closely as that forged from our vices.



Man is the master of his destiny, and his world is moulded by his creative action. Epidemics of crime and disease, cycles of accidents, have a similar explanation.

- If a man's thoughts are pure and noble, he will attract around him hosts of beneficent entities, and may sometimes wonder whence comes to him the power for achievement that seems — and truly seems — to be so much beyond his own. p. 19
- Similarly a man of foul and base thoughts attracts to himself hosts of maleficent entities, and by this added energy for evil commits crimes that astonish him in the retrospect. *Some devil must have tempted me," he will cry; and truly these demoniac forces, called to him by his own evil, add strength to it from without.*
- The good man will drive back by his very atmosphere, his aura, all that is foul and cruel. It surrounds him as a protective wall and keeps evil away from him. p. 20
- But as was written by the sage Iamblichus: **What appears to us to be an accurate definition of justice does not also appear to be so to the Gods.** For we, looking to that which is most brief, direct our attention to things present-, and to this momentary life, and the manner in which it subsists. But the Powers that are superior to us know the whole life of the soul, and all its former lives. p. 49
- This assurance that **perfect Justice rules the world** finds support from the increasing knowledge of the evolving Soul; for as it advances and begins to see on higher planes and to transmit its knowledge to the waking consciousness, we learn with ever-growing certainty, and therefore with ever-increasing joy, that the Good Law is working with undeviating accuracy, that its Agents apply it everywhere with unerring insight, with unfailing strength, and that all is therefore very well with the world and with its struggling Souls. Through the darkness rings out the cry, **all will be well** from the watchmen Souls, who carry the lamp of Divine Wisdom through the murky ways of our human city. p. 49
- We have already seen that **Thoughts build Character**; let us next realise that **Actions make Environment**... By his actions man affects his neighbours on the physical plane; he spreads happiness around him, or he causes distress, increasing or diminishing the sum of human welfare. This increase or diminution of happiness may be due to very different motives—good, bad or mixed.
- Service rendered to the full measure of opportunity in one life will produce, as effect, enlarged opportunities of service in another; thus one who in a very limited sphere helped each who came in the way, would in a future life be born into a position where openings for giving effective help were many and far-reaching.
- Wasted opportunities re-appear transmuted as limitations of the instrument, and as misfortunes in the environment.
- The wasted opportunities are transformed into frustrated longings, into desires which fail to find expression, into yearnings to help blocked by the absence of power to render it, whether from defective capacity or from lack of occasion. p. 52
- **Karma brings us ever back to rebirth, binds us to the wheel of births and deaths. Good Karma drags us back as relentlessly as bad, and the chain which is wrought out of our virtues holds as firmly and as closely as that forged from our vices.** p. 65
- How then shall the weaving of the chain be put an end to, since man must think and feel as long as he lives, and thoughts and feelings are ever generating Karma? The answer to this is the great lesson of the Bhagavad Gita, the lesson taught to the warrior prince. Neither to hermit nor to student was that lesson given, but to the warrior striving for victory, the prince immersed

in the duties of his state. Not in action but in desire, not in action but in attachment to its fruits, lies the binding force of action. An action is performed with desire to enjoy its fruits, a course is adopted with desire to obtain its results; the Soul is expectant and Nature must reply to it, it has demanded and Nature must reward.

- To every cause is bound its effect, to every action its fruit, and desire is the cord that links them together, the thread that runs between. If this could be burned up the connection would cease, and when all the bonds of the heart are broken the Soul is free. Karma can then no longer hold it; Karma can then no longer bind it; the wheel of cause and effect may continue to turn, but the Soul has become the Liberated Life.

Without attachment, constantly perform action which is duty, for, performing action without attachment, man verily reacheth the Supreme. (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3)

- To perform this Karma-Yoga — Yoga of action — as it is called, man must perform every action merely as duty, doing all in harmony with the Law. Seeking to conform to the Law on any plane of being on which he is busied, he aims at becoming a force working with the Divine Will for evolution, and yields a perfect obedience in every phase of his activity. Thus all his actions partake of the nature of sacrifice, and are offered for the turning of the Wheel of the Law, not for any fruit that they may bring; the action is performed as duty, the fruit is joyfully given for the (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3) helping of men; he has no concern with it, it belongs to the Law, and to the Law he leaves it for distribution. Whose works are all free from the moulding of desire, whose actions are burned up by the fire of wisdom, he is called a Sage by the spiritually wise. p. 66

- And so we read:

Having abandoned all attachment to the fruit of action, always content, seeking refuge in none, although doing actions he is not doing anything. Free from desire, his thoughts controlled by the Self, having abandoned all attachment, performing action by the body alone, he doth not commit sin. Content with whatsoever he receiveth, free from the pairs of opposites, without envy, balanced in success and failure, though he hath acted he is not bound; For with attachment dead, harmonious, his thoughts established in wisdom, his works sacrifices, all his action melts away. (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3)

- What is it, when all is accomplished, that still binds the Masters to the world of men? Not anything that the world can offer Them. There is no knowledge on earth They have not; there is no power on earth that They wield not; there is no further experience that might enrich Their lives; there is nothing that the world can give Them, that can draw Them back to birth. And yet They come, because a divine compulsion that is from within and from without sends Them to the earth — which otherwise They might leave for ever — to help Their brethren, to labour century after century, millennium after millennium, for the joy and service that make Their love and peace ineffable with nothing that the earth can give Them, save the joy of seeing other Souls growing into Their likeness, beginning to share with them the conscious life of God.
- The gathering together of Souls into groups, forming families, castes, nations, races, introduces a new element of perplexity into karmic results, and it is here that room is found for what are called 'accidents', as well as for the adjustments continually being made by the Lords of Karma. It appears that while nothing can befall a man that is not 'in his Karma' as an individual, advantage may be taken of, say, a national or a seismic catastrophe to enable him to work off a piece of bad Karma which would not normally have fallen into the life-span through which he is passing. Ch XII Collective Karma
- Similarly, benefits may accrue to him by this indirect action of the Law, as when he belongs to a

nation that is enjoying the fruit of some good national Karma; and he may thus receive some debt owed to him by Nature, payment of which would not have fallen within his present lot had only his individual Karma been concerned.

- A man's birth in a particular nation is influenced by certain general principles of evolution as well as by his immediate characteristics.
- Where long series of incarnations have been followed, it has been found that some individuals progress from sub-race to sub-race very regularly, whereas others are more erratic, taking repeated incarnations perhaps in one sub-race. Within the limits of the sub-race, the individual characteristics of the man will draw him towards one nation or another, and we may notice dominant national characteristics re-emerging on the stage of history en bloc after the normal interval of fifteen hundred years; thus crowds of Romans reincarnate as Englishmen, the enterprising, colonizing, conquering, imperial instincts reappearing as national attributes.
- A man in whom such national characteristics were strongly marked, and whose time for rebirth had come, would be drafted into the English nation by his Karma and would then share the national destiny for good or for evil, so far as that destiny affected the fate of an individual.
- The family tie is naturally of a more personal character than is the national, and those who weave bonds of close affection in one life tend to be drawn together again as members of the same family. Sometimes these ties recur very persistently life after life, and the destinies of two individuals are very intimately interwoven in successive incarnations. Sometimes, in consequence of the different lengths of the Devachans necessitated by differences of intellectual and spiritual activity during the earth-lives spent together — members of a family may be scattered and may not meet again until after several incarnations.
- Speaking generally, the more close the tie in the higher regions of life, the greater the likelihood of rebirth in a family group. Here again the Karma of the individual is affected by the interlinked Karmas of his family, and he may enjoy or suffer through these in a way not inherent in his own life-Karma, and so receive or pay karmic debts, out-of-date, as we may say. So far as the personality is concerned, this seems to bring with it a certain balancing up or compensation... in order that complete justice may be done...
- **It seems that when men generate a large number of malignant Thought-forms of a destructive character, and when these congregate in huge masses on the Astral Plane, their energy may be, and is, precipitated on the physical plane, stirring up wars, revolutions, and social disturbances and upheavals of every kind, falling as collective Karma on their progenitors and effecting widespread ruin.**
- Thus then collectively also Man is the master of his destiny, and his world is moulded by his creative action. Epidemics of crime and disease, cycles of accidents, have a similar



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explanation.

- Thought-Forms of anger aid in the perpetration of a murder; these Elementals are nourished by the crime, and the results of the crime — the hatred and the revengeful thoughts of those who loved the victim, the fierce resentment of the criminal, his baffled fury when violently sent out of the world—still further reinforce their host with many malignant forms; these again from the astral plane impel an evil man to fresh crime, and again the circle of new impulses is trodden, and we have an epidemic of violent deeds.
- In every direction, in endless fashions, do men's evil thoughts play havoc, as he who should have been a divine co-builder in the Universe uses his creative power to destroy.
- Diseases spread, and the thoughts of fear which follow their progress act directly as strengtheners of the power of the disease; magnetic disturbances are set up and propagated, and re-act on the magnetic spheres of people within the affected area. In every direction, in endless fashions, do men's evil thoughts play havoc, as he who should have been a divine co-builder in the Universe uses his creative power to destroy.
- The working out in detail of collective Karma would carry us far beyond the limits of such an elementary work as the present and far beyond the knowledge of the writer; only these fragmentary hints can at present be offered to the student. For precise understanding a long study of individual cases would be necessary, traced through many thousands of years. Speculation on these matters is idle; it is patient observation that is needed. Ch. XIII, Conclusion
- Such is an outline of the great Law of Karma and of its workings, by a knowledge of which a man may accelerate his evolution, by the utilization of which a man may free himself from bondage, and become, long ere his race has trodden its course, one of the Helpers and Saviours of the World. A deep and steady conviction of the truth of this Law gives to life an immovable serenity and a perfect fearlessness: nothing can touch us that we have not wrought, nothing can injure us that we have not merited. And as everything that we have sown must ripen into harvest in due season, and must be reaped, it is idle to lament over the reaping when it is painful; it may as well be done now as at any future time, since it cannot be evaded, and, once done, it cannot return to trouble us again.
- Painful Karma may therefore well be faced with a joyful heart, as a thing to be gladly worked through and done with; it is better to have it behind us than before us, and every debt paid leaves us with less to pay. Would that the world knew and could feel the strength that comes from this resting on the Law. Unfortunately to most in the Western world it is a mere chimera, and even among Theosophists belief in Karma is more an intellectual assent than a living and fruitful conviction in the light of which the life is lived.
- The strength of a belief, says Professor Bain, is measured by its influence on conduct, and belief in Karma ought to make the life pure, strong, serene and glad.
- Only our own deeds can hinder us; only our own will can fetter us. Once let men recognize this truth, and the hour of their liberation has struck. Nature cannot enslave the Soul that by



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See also

- Annie Besant (1918) (in en), *Karma* (<https://archive.org/details/karma00besa>), Los Angeles: Theosophical Society in England, [Wikidata Q116401975](#), [OCLC 844699582](#) (<http://worldcat.org/oclc/844699582>)
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